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# ENG 5010-001: De/Colonial Poetics of Irony: Contemporary Native American Literature

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**De/Colonial Poetics of Irony:  
Contemporary Native American Literature**

"You have to understand that white people  
invented / irony." Sherman Alexie

ENG 5010 sect. 001, CRN 94396

Dr. Jeannie Ludlow

Fall, 2013

W 3:30-6:00 pm

in Coleman 3159

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Office Hours: T 10-11:30, T 1-2, W 1-2:30, R 1-3

**Course Description:** This graduate seminar will focus on the various ways postmodern Native American authors use irony simultaneously to describe and destabilize the systemic, on-going colonization of indigenous peoples in the U.S. Seminar participants will read and analyze novels, short fiction, drama, and poetry, utilizing critical concepts and cultural contexts from required secondary sources.

**Course Expectations:** Because this is a graduate seminar, certain expectations apply: seminar participants will arrive on time and fully prepared to engage with all the readings and ideas scheduled for that week (if you get behind, please contact me to discuss what is going on with you—don't flounder); seminar participants will have primary responsibility for determining and communicating which aspects of any given topic need further explanation or contextualization; seminar participants will treat ourselves, one another and any guests who come to our meetings in a manner that is respectful and professional.

**Special circumstances:** If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact EIU's Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible. If you require assistance with any other circumstance that arises, please contact me immediately, so we can work out a good plan of action together.

**Required texts:**

You are required to do all assigned reading for this course. Six required texts for this course are available from Textbook Rental. Some required readings will also be available only on-line via D2L or on the internet.

**TRS TEXTS**

- Alexie, Sherman (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene). *Face: Poems*. Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press, 2009.
- Erdrich, Louise (Turtle Mountain Chippewa). *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. NY: HarperCollins/Perennial, 2001.
- Gansworth, Eric (Onondaga). *Mending Skins*. Lincoln, NB: U NB P, 2005.
- Hausman, Blake (Cherokee). *Riding the Trail of Tears*. Lincoln, NB: U NB P, 2011.
- King, Thomas (Cherokee). *Green Grass, Running Water*. NY: Harper/Perennial, 1993.
- Yahgulanaas, Michael Nicholl (Haida). *Red: A Haida Manga*. Vancouver, BC: D&M Publishers, 2009.

**D2L PRIMARY TEXTS**

- Glancy, Diane (Cherokee). "The Women Who Loved House Trailers." *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays*. Norman, OK: U OK P, 2002.
- Mojica, Monique (Kuna/Rappahannock). *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*. Toronto, ON: Women's Press, 1991.
- Vizenor, Gerald (White Earth Ojibwe). *Selections from Landfill Meditation: Crossblood Stories*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1991.
- Harjo, Joy (Creek). *Selected poems*.  
*Selected poetry by various authors*.

**Other Requirements:**

You will also need regular access to a computer and e-mail and the ability to use D2L. If you need help with this, let me know right away.

IN ORDER TO PASS THIS COURSE, YOU MUST  
SUBMIT ALL ASSIGNED WRITTEN WORK  
FOR GRADING.  
EXCESSIVE ABSENCE WILL RESULT IN  
AUTOMATIC FAILURE.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Graduate students are expected to be present for all seminar meetings; a one-session absence is the equivalent of one full week of absence in an undergraduate course. In-class use of a cell phone is the equivalent of an absence for that seminar meeting.

**GRADES** will be earned through the following components, each of which will be assigned a letter grade:

- 25% Participation (includes attendance, in-class activities, discussion based on successful completion of all reading, and in-class writing)
- 15% One contextual presentation for a primary text (focus should be first on tribal history/culture and then on author's biographical info)
- 20% Five short (3-7 pp.) analytical papers on required primary texts
- 5% Proposal for seminar research paper
- 10% First draft, seminar research paper, to be shared with the class
- 25% Final draft, seminar research paper

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** In this course, we will comply fully with EIU's academic integrity policy (see your catalog). Violation of this policy includes (but is not limited to):

1. quoting from a source without fully and correctly citing that source and/or without using quotation marks;
2. paraphrasing from a source without fully and correctly citing that source;
3. turning in a paper with an incorrect or incomplete works cited list;
4. falsifying data;
5. turning in someone else's work as your own;
6. turning in your own work that was written for another course, without prior permission from both professors.

Violations of EIU's academic integrity policy will result in an automatic failing grade in this course and notification of the Office of Student Standards. For more information, see [www.eiu.edu/~judicial](http://www.eiu.edu/~judicial).

**Incompletes in this course:** A grade of "incomplete" will only be given in this course in cases of documented medical or personal emergency. According to this policy, "documented" means that you are able to provide documentation that you were under the care of a health care provider or working with some other professional (e.g., a lawyer, your child's pediatrician); "emergency" means that there is no way you could have foreseen this situation and/or planned around it so that you could have completed the course work in a timely manner. Although I am sympathetic about the intensity of graduate work, I will not consider being overwhelmed or having trouble balancing the workload for this course with your other obligations (work, education, social,

family) to be good reasons for a grade of "I." If you feel like you are getting behind in the course, please meet with me as soon as possible to discuss your situation and how I might help you to get back on track.

**About written work:** Please note that all written work—formal and informal—for this seminar must be well-constructed, well-reasoned, and grammatically correct. If you need help with your writing, let me know right away and plan to meet with me before assignments are due. All written work for this course must meet academic standards for accurate citation/documentation. Any written work that does not correctly utilize MLA citation conventions is automatically failing; two assignments that fail to cite appropriately will lead to an automatic failure in the course. If you need help with citation and documentation, contact me. I am happy to help (before the assignment's due date, of course). The Writing Center can also help you. **Late work is strongly discouraged;** late work submitted without advance warning will earn a reduced grade.

#### ASSIGNMENTS

**Five short (3-7 pp.) analytical papers on required primary texts** For this assignment, you will write an analytical paper (note: "to analyze" means "to break down the text into its constituent elements or parts and describe/show understanding of those elements individually and in relation to the whole") about each of five primary texts of your choice. The analytical requirements of the paper are the same whether you choose to write about a poem or a novel; of course, if you are writing about a novel, you will want to narrow the scope of your analysis significantly. **These papers are due the day the primary text is discussed in class.** In order to pass, these papers must: engage substantively with the concept of irony and with cultural contextual information (e.g., tribal context, U.S./American context, postmodern context); include direct quotes from the text, cited correctly, as evidence for your analytical claims; use secondary or theoretical texts/concepts that are required for class, when relevant (don't force it). These papers may include independent research, if you wish, but do not require it. A great strategy for class is to have one or more of these papers serve as the foundation for your final seminar research paper.

**One contextual presentation for a primary text**

Students will sign up for this assignment the second week of class. To fulfill this assignment, students will (individually or working in pairs) bring to class contextual information about the tribal affiliation of the primary text's author (both the nation's history and its contemporary situation), about the tribal context of the primary text (if different from the author's tribal affiliation), and about the author's biography, if you wish (biography is not required). This information should be presented in a format that is portable (i.e., your classmates can take it with them) and visual as well as textual. The best presentations will be based, at least in part, on information provided by the tribe and/or by sources that demonstrate consistent respect for the people's understanding of their own cultural contexts. In other words, be on the lookout for racism, white privilege, and classism in your sources and avoid sources that demonstrate these qualities whenever you can.

**Seminar research paper** Detailed instructions for this assignment will be distributed after the fifth week of class.

**SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS FOR WEEKS 2-3**

**8/28** Read: Moore, "Sherman Alexie: Irony, Intimacy, and Agency" (D2L); Gruber, "Expressing Humor in Contemporary Native Writing: Forms" (D2L); Erdrich, *Last Resort* to p. 188  
 CONTEXTUAL PRESENTATION: Turtle Mountain Chippewa

**9/4** Read: Hutcheon, "Risky Business" (D2L); finish Erdrich